4.11 AESTHETIC/VISUAL RESOURCES

This section identifies existing aesthetic/visual resources within the Project area, existing management and regulatory information for those resources, and the impact of the proposed Project and alternatives on those resources. Management direction and regulatory information were gathered from local jurisdiction general plans and the BLM's California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan.

4.11.1 Environmental Setting

The proposed Project would cross a combination of private and public lands. The BLM is the dominant Federal land management agency for the lands crossed by the Project route. Of the approximately 303.5 miles of proposed Project route, approximately 122 miles would cross BLM lands that are administered by the BLM California Desert District (CDD). CDD lands are managed under the CDCA Plan.

Construction activities would take place primarily within an existing pipeline corridor. The landscape surrounding the route is characterized by open desert habitat with terrain ranging from flat dry lakebeds, rolling hills, and slopes to jagged mountains with rocky peaks. At MP 44.0, the proposed Project crosses the Pacific Crest Trail near the intersection of Cameron Road and Oak Creek Road, just outside the town of Tehachapi. Although hydrotesting is planned for this vicinity, no work is planned adjacent to the trail. Vegetative cover in the area consists of creosote bush, diverse cactus, and yucca species, as well as a wide variety of perennial flowers. The eastern and southern end of the route through San Bernardino County to the California-Arizona border in Riverside County is a combination of flat, barren, dry lakebeds and rolling hills. The vegetation consists primarily of creosote bush scrub. There are few residential areas, and limited cultivated croplands along the proposed Project route. At approximately MP 220 the Project route crosses SR 66 (National Trails Highway) near Cadiz. SR 66 is not a State-Designated Scenic Highway or a National Scenic Byway.

BLM California Desert Conservation Area Plan

Scenic resources on the CDCA lands are managed using the CDCA's Multiple Use Classes (MUCs). The BLM uses MUCs to manage public lands and resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that would best meet present and future needs of the public. The proposed Project crosses CDD lands assigned an MUC of M (Moderate). Management of the Moderate MUC is a controlled balance between higher intensity use and protection of public lands. Energy transmission facilities within energy production and utility corridors are allowed on lands managed under the M classification (BLM 1980 as amended). The proposed Project as a conversion of an existing pipeline facility is in conformance with the management objectives of the CDCA Plan.

The BLM uses a Visual Resources Management (VRM) system to identify and manage scenic values on Federal lands. The VRM system classifies visual resources on BLM lands in one of four categories: Class I, II, III, or IV—with Class I having the highest visual sensitivity and Class IV being the least sensitive. Of the approximately 122 miles of BLM-administered lands crossed by the proposed Project, the pipeline route crosses lands classified as VRM Class III. The degree of modification allowed to the basic elements of the landscape in Class III include: "modifications are evident, but should remain subordinate to the existing landscape".

Modifications to the landscape within the existing corridor are consistent with BLM's intent to minimize new scars across the California Desert.

4.11.2 Regulatory Setting

Federal

The proposed Project crosses the BLM's CDCA. The CDCA Plan (1980 as amended) is the programmatic policy document outlining the management direction for this 25-million-acre area. The CDCA is divided into four bio-regions with specific regional focus: Northern and Eastern Mojave Plan, Northern and Eastern Colorado Plan, West Mojave Plan, and Imperial Sand Dunes Plan.

The proposed Project would cross portions of the Northern and Eastern Mojave Plan, Northern and Eastern Colorado Plan, and West Mojave Plan areas. The BLM designates utility corridors within the CDCA for all: (1) new electrical transmission

towers and cables of 161 kV or above, (2) all pipelines with diameters greater than 12 inches, (3) coaxial cables for interstate transmission, and (4) major aqueducts or canals for interbasin transfers of water. When the AAPL was approved it was located outside of the CDCA approved corridor. BLM previously made a determination that the FEIS for AAPL concluded that the constructed route was preferable to a corridor route because it was shorter, less expensive, resulted in less significant environmental issues, and affect fewer cultural sites. As such, no plan amendment was needed. The same reasoning applies to the Project. This area includes the Cadiz Lateral.

State

The State of California has not designated any scenic areas or Scenic Highways along or in the vicinity of the proposed Project.

Local

The proposed Project would cross through Kern, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties and in the vicinity of the city of Barstow. San Bernardino County General Plan describes the current Scenic Resource policies and actions of the County. No scenic resources identified by San Bernardino County occur along or are crossed by the proposed Project. The remaining local jurisdictions do not have specific aesthetics policies or ordinances that apply to the proposed Project.

4.11.3 Significance Criteria

An adverse impact on aesthetic resources was considered significant and would require mitigation if the proposed Project would:

- cause inconsistency with adopted VRM plans or local ordinances. In those areas where no VRM plans exist, impacts were determined by examining the study area for sensitive viewsheds, areas of high user volumes, and areas of unique visual resources. Sensitive resources were then examined on a case-by-case basis to determine the level of impact. Significant visual impacts would dominate the viewshed from sensitive locations and change the character of the landscape both in terms of physical characteristics and land uses;

- result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic area or vista;

- substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic area or highway;

- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and

- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

4.11.4 Impact Analysis and Mitigation

The proposed Project would result in two types of potential impacts on visual resources: short-term impacts resulting from construction activities and related materials and equipment staging, and long-term impacts from some additional pipeline scarring of the landscape and new aboveground facilities.

Construction

The impacts from vegetation clearing would depend on the type of vegetation that would be affected. In agricultural croplands restoration of vegetation may occur within one growing season, which would limit the visual impact to a short time. Where the new pipeline would cross arid desert terrain the visual impact would persist for many years. Landform and vegetation changes would introduce contrasts in visual scale; spatial characteristics; and form, line, color, and texture. Where the pipeline is constructed along an existing right-of-way the impacts of construction would be less evident. The open nature of topography along most of the Project route allows unobstructed views of equipment and construction activities. Dust generated from these activities, as well as the presence of equipment and construction vehicles, can be observed for some distance in the surrounding area. These impacts are tempered because: (1) the proposed Project is an existing pipeline; therefore, pipeline scarring and in some areas the presence of aboveground facilities already exist; and (2) the duration of long-distance views of dust and construction equipment would be limited. Residential areas, the Pacific Crest Trail, highways, and major roadways would be the most sensitive to the temporary visual impacts.

The Cadiz Lateral pipeline would be constructed parallel to an existing 6-inch fuel line. Construction would result in a wider visual scar. However, due to the existing fuel line

and the expansion of the scar would be less severe than the introduction of a new scar across an undisturbed landscape.

Because the duration of views of construction activities would be limited and the resulting facilities would be similar in mass and scale to those used for the existing pipeline, impacts on aesthetic/visual resources from construction activities were determined to be less than significant (Class III).

Operation

The new metering facilities, pig launchers/receivers, valves, powerline, and pipeline markers would be new permanent introductions to the landscape. The new metering facilities would be constructed within existing facilities and would not noticeably change the existing landscape. The other aboveground structures would be constructed within or immediately adjacent to the existing pipeline corridor and would not significantly alter the existing landscape. The new powerline would be an approximately one-half mile addition to an existing powerline. Maintenance visits to the aboveground facilities would be infrequent and would involve fewer and smaller pieces of equipment than those used in construction.

To minimize potential visual impacts, EPNG would implement the following measures:

- grading during restoration would be conducted in a manner that minimizes erosion and conforms to the natural topography;

- revegetating disturbed areas with native plants (except in agricultural and residential areas where crops and landscaping would be replanted)

- soils and rock excavated but not used to backfill or restore contour would be evenly spread onto cleared non-agricultural areas; and

- permanent pipeline ROW markers would adhere to the color coding scheme for buried utilities developed by the American Public Works Association. EPNG's existing pipeline is identified by yellow markers, and similarly colored markers would be used for the proposed Project.

These measures would minimize the Project's potential impacts on aesthetic/visual resources and would conform to applicable BLM VRM classifications. As such, operational impacts to aesthetic resources would be less than significant (Class III).

4.11.5 Cumulative Impacts

The existing visual quality of the Project area is influenced by historical and current land uses, including commercial and residential development; transmission lines, pipelines, and distribution lines; recreation; and agriculture. As most of the infrastructure associated with the proposed Project already exists, the visual character of the Project area would not significantly change as a result of the Project. BLM has specifically identified utility corridors to co-locate pipelines and other utilities and thereby minimize the number of separate corridors through the California Desert. Although construction activities for other projects—including those outlined in Section 5.5, Summary of Cumulative Impacts—could cumulatively affect visual resources in the vicinity of the Project, these impacts would require project specific mitigation to be implemented in connection with that Project. As such, cumulative impacts to aesthetic resources would be less than significant (Class III).

Alternatives

No Project Alternative

The No Project Alternative would not convert the former All American crude oil pipeline system to a natural gas transmission system. The visual landscape would remain the same, the existing pipeline scar would remain and no additional aboveground structures would be added.

Ehrenberg to Daggett Alternative

The Ehrenberg to Daggett Alternative would not construct the portion of Line 1903 from MP 0 to MP 132.1. The visual impacts associated with construction of this line, although less than significant, would not occur. The impacts to aesthetic resources of this alternative would be less than significant (Class III).

Ehrenberg to Cadiz Alternative

The Ehrenberg to Cadiz Alternative would not construct the portion of Line 1903 from MP 0 to MP 215.75. The visual impacts associated with construction of this line, although less than significant, would not occur. The impacts to aesthetic resources of this alternative would be less than significant (Class III).

4.11.6 References

County of Kern. 2000. Kern County General Plan. Kern Planning Department, Bakersfield, California.

County of Riverside. 2003. Riverside County General Plan. Found at http://www.rcip.org/general_plan_toc.html

County of San Bernardino. 2002. San Bernardino County General Plan. Adopted July 1, 1989, Revised September 10, 2002. Economic Development and Public Service Group – Land Use Services Department.

US Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1980, as amended. California Desert Conservation Area Plan.